



## Ally is an Action Word

July 11, 2021 by Educator Barnes

Janet Jackson once sang, "What have you done for me lately?" I assert that many allies cannot answer this question in a meaningful way that counts. It is great if allies believe the words written in the Declaration of Independence where it states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." However, that is not enough. Real allies take action to ensure that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness can be pursued by everyone.

Performative allyship is not a good look, and it helps only the people out here shuckin' and jivin' with faux support of the people who are struggling or facing barriers. Many times those

people cannot enact change or push it through because allies are silent when they should be vocal. This does not mean that it is impossible but allyship in action can make change happen faster.

Recently, I had the opportunity to see an ally in action. If you follow me on Twitter, you know that I am vocal about my name being misspelled and mispronounced by former teachers and former colleagues. I have shared these stories to help others understand the harm it causes and to emphasize the importance of teachers pronouncing and spelling their students and colleagues names correctly.

On July 1, 2021, I tweeted, "When a person misspells my name, I respond with the correct spelling. Most people apologize & use the correct spelling moving forward. Unfortunately, some individuals continue to misspell my name or send communication without using my name at all. Please know I always notice."

Tina Ahlgern, who was previously the teacher of the year for Indianapolis Public Schools and runner up for Indiana Teacher of the Year, responded to my tweet. Ahlgern said, "There is an NBI before the @NEAToday Representative Assembly regarding educating members on the importance of name pronunciation. I added an amendment to include spelling, and thinking of you, made sure to include that this dignity should be extended to all, not just students."

She continued in another tweet with additional information. "And highlighting one more key piece of your original tweet that I originally overlooked... I was excited to hear from a delegate that included the importance of students actually hearing/seeing their name. The correct response is not simply avoiding the name to avoid offending."

I had no clue this new business item had been introduced by the National Education Association. This is the real work. The people who want change may not be in the room where the change can happen. Allies who are in these rooms need to do more than show up. They need to put their professed beliefs into action. Change should happen because an ally is present instead of the status quo continuing.

I thank Tina for being an ally, and I hope other allies understand the importance of taking more action than stating they are an ally.